

J. Richard Zeidell email to Richard Killblane,

17 April 2003.

Thank you so much for your reply to my request for info. I read your interview with Col. Sunder with great interest and would like to speak with him myself. One of the members of the 854th that I had been in touch with who lives in Pa. is greatly interested about the Mike boat that exploded and the brave man who rode it out. I'd also like to find out about the unit citation my Co. was awarded as it was during the time I was there and how I could obtain it or a copy or something. Col. Sunder mentioned the problems with the 854th's morale and lack of experience of his men. The original 854 trained at Ft. Story both with intensive combat training at the fort and with Navy Seal teams and with what our primary jobs would be upon arriving in VN. We also trained TDY at Ft Eustis and learned how to rig ships, load and off load and so on. When we arrived in VN in Sept. 66 we were very aggressive and tackled our chore quite well, not to say we didn't have our problems, but as a unit we got the job done. When it came time for individuals to rotate back to the states, their replacements flew over individually one by one. (We orig. went over by ship as a complete unit) These new replacements came to us with peace symbols on their helmets and hung around their necks and bad attitudes to match. It was things going on back in the states that we knew nothing of and led to a lot of infighting. They trashed a lot of what we worked hard to build. The canteen we built was destroyed and put off limits. The mess hall was a mess. When we tried to get the officers to understand what was happening, they dismissed it and kind of said we were just jealous of the new guys!? Perhaps if they had listened Col. Sunder's job would have been a little easier. Although it sounds like all turned out pretty good anyway. I never heard of the term Red Patches and don't recall ever seeing any, must have been after I left. Again thank you for getting touch with me, and let me know what I can do help at all. I looked for the questionnaire you spoke of but couldn't find it, I'll look a little closer. I have been in touch with the transportation assoc. you spoke of, but it seems they are quite preoccupied with the history of the gun trucks than the history of the trans corp. By the way we had a big hand painted sign over the motor pool door with Sad Sack the old cartoon character in a jeep saying "we can hack it." I don't think I would trade anything in this world for those miserable thirteen months and all of the memories both good and bad I have. J. Richard Zeidell

Being in Vietnam at such a young age I was not satisfied with doing just one thing and was fortunate to have a variety of jobs My primary MOS was as a document specialist. Which was kind of boring. My friend from NJ Frank Marino drove big rigs in the motor pool and would tell stories of what it was like on the convoys to Phu Cat, Ane Khe, and Plieku. So seeing I had an army drivers license that included everything from a jeep to the large crane at LST beach. I got into the motor pool. I served as driver for Lt. Stephen Shoals, Lt. Donald Cerifice, drove the fuel truck to LST and refueled equipment. Drove in convoys up north, even went into the 25th AO to rescue or blow up a 5 ton rig stranded with a broken axle with Lt. Cerifice and Sgt. Hall when we got caught in a firefight and I was wounded in the leg. Which by the way I'm still waiting for my purple heart and CIB. The wound I received was a bullet through my trousers that nicked my leg. Upon seeing the severe casualties the 25th was getting, I was embarrassed to be too concerned about it. Marino and I hauled a water purification system up to a place we called "The Valley", it was so big we had to rig two 5 ton tractors with lowboy trailers in tandem to maneuver it. My radio call sign was Uniform Oscar 5 and Sgt. Carney was our radio tech. He was a great Sgt. and

I wish him well wherever he may be today. I also served as both a stevedore and longshoreman until an accident at LST beach where a RT forklift full of PSP steel runway material fell on my feet. After that, I had duty as a radioman on the ammo ships and relayed info to LST for Mike boats if one was taking on water or sinking or needed the floating crane to come to their aid. Also, the tonnage coming in to LST. I also occasionally filled in as a RT forklift driver and once was even called upon to help in a murder investigation of a local prostitute who was paid by the VC to insert a razor blade in her vagina as many others were. The soldier she cut up beat her to death. I had some training with The Judge Advocate General's Corp. There are so many other stories and memories, how the ROK troops who were supposed to be on our side would fire upon us. The Korean Navy that manned the LST's and taught me how to use chop sticks of which I still have several pair that to this day I use when I eat Chinese food. But I will go through your questionnaire and try recall as much info as possible question by question. That man in Pa I spoke of, name I think is Jury (last name) in Mechanicsburg, Penn. I'll try and get in touch with and have him contact you if he will. He was also a document specialist. I have had contact with my good friend Frank Marino many years ago, but around the mid 90's contact stopped and although I've tried I cannot locate him. He may have died. I know a lot of this info will be of use to you, and I have crystal clear recollections of it all, heck I can even smell that place as I'm thinking of it! But considering you were not there at that time something might get lost in the translation to you. I do have a lot of pictures but my scanner is tore up and I don't know when I'll be able to replace it. With a wife and four children food, lights and rent come first.

From: ibt363 [mailto:ibt363@peoplepc.com]

Sent: Wednesday, March 08, 2006 4:39 PM

To: killblaner@eustis.army.mil

Subject: 854th TC 159th Battalion 5th Trans Corp VN 66-67

Mr. Killblaner,

My name is Rick Zeidell, back in 2001 we talked on the phone and email on you doing a history of the 159th Batt. and our time served in Vietnam. I am an electrical contractor and was nearly killed in an accident that year on a 480 volt line while working on a paving plant. Then came 9/11/2001, and my life along with the rest of the world hasn't been the same since. So I never did get back with you on contributing to the history of the 159th. I had reason to look Col Sunder up and typed Sunders Wunders in my browser. and your history pages came up. I wish I had tho, I was one of the original group that assembled at Ft. Story where we did Amphib Assault training, and learned how to rig a ship while tdy at Ft. Eustis school, We left from Ft. Story to Norfolk where we boarded the USS Maurice Rose and departed for VN in Sept. of 1966. I headed back to the states 13 months later, and was discharge in Oakland Ca. and resumed my life as normal as possible.

Now 38 years later. During the forming of a new Veterans Caucus group here in North Carolina, one of the emails I received was from a former marine (VN Vet), who questioned whether I was a vet or not. I fired off a email back with info on where and when I served, and mentioned if he wanted to verify any of it to contact Col. Sunder who also lives here in NC somewhere. You had given me his email addy back then but after several different PC's and servers, it got lost. When I typed in sunders wunders and got to the Ft Eustis history site, I started reading some of the

replies you got back. On Col. Sunder, he made mention of the 854th, and about the canteen being burned down and mess hall being trashed by the new replacement troops with very bad attitudes. (which by the way was so very true). He also mentioned the mike boat explosion and fire.

OK, now to the reason for me contacting you. Back around 2000, I found only one other vet who was from the original 854th, Kerry Jury from Mechanicsburg Pa. We talked quite often thru emails for awhile, then on a trip back from New York we got together in his town for breakfast and tell war stories. One thing he mentioned, which seemed important to him, was a mike boat accident, and a fire, but he didn't know the whole story, and seemed surprised I didn't know anything about it. Several times in his emails after, he would mention it and again seemed put off I didn't know. I just figured maybe it happened when I was in Japan on R&R, or off on one of our missions up north with the 25th Inf, which we were gone up to 3 weeks sometimes. Yesterday while reading the Col's text, I saw what Kerry was talking about, and thought for a minute, hey where the heck was I that I didn't know about the canteen gone, which I originally helped build. We built it and a 2 story officers barracks and a garage at LST Beach out of the lumber that was used as dunnage off the ammo ships. We would send a BARC out there to get it and bring it to our base on Red Beach Road.

So this got me thinking, do I ever remember the canteen gone?? or even seeing the building down? And I have not one single recollection of any of it. I do remember every single thing from the time we were in Ft. Story, quite clearly, and all else up to the return flight from Japan on a C-130. We had to stop and pick up a wounded GI and I still to this day can hear his screams, blood was squirting 2 feet in the air and the medics were working on him. But that's it, I don't remember landing, or if the guy made it alive or them taking his body off the plane, The next thing I can recall is sitting on bleachers the day before we derosed out of VN and getting an attaboy speech and that we had unloaded the most tonnage of all the terminal service units. I was in country 9 months before taking R & R, so that would have to be around June or July. One date and mission I can recall was July 22nd or around that time, my birthday, I remember grabbing my mail, helmet and rifle, and jumping in a jeep with Lt. Cerifice and Sgt Hall. We had to go rescue a broke down tractor that was hauling a D 8 bulldozer and had a trailer loaded with a spare axle, tools and C-4 to blow it if we couldn't fix it. We headed up north to its location when we got ambushed, and the 25th Inf bailed us out. The jeep and radio was all shot up, and the clutch tore up. I was nicked in the leg. They towed it to their base and fixed it up, all the time the base was under heavy attack. I still remember sittin on a cot in the medic's tent opening my mail which were birthdays cards from friends and family home. We got word that the tractor we were sent to help made it to a base somewhere and was safe. I have a few other murky thought of things that went on after that, but just bits and pieces of missions at night. Otherwise those last 4 months are a complete blank. Esp the canteen, I would think I definitely would remember that. I know I wasn't awol or anything, because I have an honorable discharge, I just don't remember those last 4 months. And it's taken 38 years to even remember that I don't know what went on during that period.

Is there anyway you can send me, or tell me how I can locate, the roster of all those original members of the 854th? Eddie Bartolotta (not sure on the spelling) took R & R together with me, and would have been on that C-130. I have tried for years to look him up, I know he was from Pa originally, but have not been able to locate him or anyone else from the 854th except KL Jury.

My service number was XXXXXXXXXX if you should need it, I left as a Spec 4 and dates of service was from Dec 28th 1065 to Dec 28th 1971, and Sept 1966 to Nov 1st 1967 in VN. Thank you for doing the history on our time in VN.

Thanks

J. Richard Zeidell (Zeidel on army dd214 it was always misspelled on it) Vets Affairs Cmn
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From: Richard.E.Killblane@us.army.mil
Sent: Mar 9, 2006 7:50 AM
To: ibt363@peoplepc.com
Subject: RE: 854th TC 159th Battalion 5th Trans Corp VN 66-67

Rich, I remember you from your last email. You're the only vet from the 854th that I have any contact with. I'm sorry to say that I don't have any rosters of the 854th TC.

If you don't remember the new guys burning down the club then it probably happened after you left.

Before the current war broke out, I was writing a history of TC operations in Vietnam and started with the Qui Nhon area. This has a lot more detail than the unit histories that you have read. It may jog some memory cells. When it does, please write me what you remember.

I'm currently swamped writing about the current war. I have the opportunity to do what should have been done during your war. I'm writing a detailed history of transportation operations while the war is still fresh in people's minds. You would be surprised at how much people forget in even a year. At the same time I'm still collecting information about TC units in Vietnam so someday I will finish the original project. Rich

From: ibt363 <ibt363@peoplepc.com>
Date: Friday, March 10, 2006 1:05 pm
Subject: RE: 854th TC 159th Battalion 5th Trans Corp VN 66-67

Hi Rich,

Thanks for replying back. A few details I recall that I may have overlooked while reading your history project, which btw, was great, I could almost feel the heat dust and smell of that place while reading it.

As far as the Shell fuel tanks near LST Beach, if I read it correctly it said they were almost destroyed. Actually, they were, one anyway. We went on red alert early in the evening one night and from our compound on red beach, we could see the flames shooting way in the air and it lit the bay between us. We were sent to guard the remaining tanks, and had to walk around the

remaining tanks, all the while expecting them to blow any minute. Shots were heard near the end of the dock, and 2 what we believe to be Montagnards, because they were at least 6 feet tall, were killed in their sampan that had a 50 cal. on it which they used to blow the first tank. I am not sure when this happened time wise. but I'd have to think it was early on in my tour, as it was the first of many dead bodies I recall seeing, and also the first time I realized this really was a war we were in.

On the ROK troops, the first time I crossed a bridge at night, we were ill informed of the procedure, at each end was a guard post manned by Korean ROK's. and if you didn't turn your headlights off, and turn marker lights on they would open fire on you. Luckily for me they were poor shots that night I crossed that first bridge up north. Also that same night I remember a deuce and half from the 25th Inf. pulling along side us and troops reached down and yanked us out of our jeep, and we (me as driver esp) got chewed out big time for being between bridges at night. No one told us about the headlight/marker lights, nor did they tell us that the areas between certain bridges were targets of our artillery. Guess it was my lucky night all the way around. When the 854th first arrived in country, by way of a 31 day nasty trip on the USS Maurice Rose, all our trucks equipment and so on, came on another ship. While unloading it one of two contact trucks was dropped and destroyed. These were I'd say the most valuable trucks we had, they had a portable welder, cutting torches, a generator, just about a rolling gas station. It was not replaced. We also lost many vehicles that were DX'ed because the cost of repairs went over the TOE budget on them. I remember we lost a truck, 2 1/2 ton, because of a spark plug. From what I read that may have changed later in the war. We also lost all of our tools that we so carefully packed up in Conex containers back at Ft Story, they never made it there. We scrounged from here and there and did a lot of trading to get what we needed to perform all the maintenance on those vehicles. The most wear and tear was on brakes and clutches, and then 2nd Lt. Stephen Sholes, OIC of the motor pool, was always getting the drivers together and telling us how important it was to use the transmissions to slow us down, not the brakes.(ironically, I am constantly telling my wife and kids the same thing here in NC where we live in the mountains and can easily go from 3000 feet to 5000 feet elevation in 8-10 miles trip)

One thing that PO'd us all big time, our compound on Red Beach Rd. had a So Vietnamese army compound across the road, and they had quite a few deuce and halves, given to them from US Army, same as ours plus their own, and they could get all the parts they needed, but we couldn't. And those trucks just sat there day after day, hardly ever being used. The LT and motor pool sgt would load all trucks up with C-rats and water, and send the ones that wouldn't pass the IG inspection we had about every 2 weeks or so, to the Leper Colony, to hide them, so they wouldn't get DX'd I got in a bit of trouble there for awhile once when I had a chance to tow one of our trucks that didn't pass insp to the DX depot, and there I saw loads of vehicles, some almost new, that maybe hit a mine or got shot up, most from the infantry units, and we tried to get our CO to let us scrap much needed parts off them. He said no, so we stupidly went over his head and went to the IG. Next thing I knew, I was going out to the ships as a stevedore. Before that I had the sharpest jeep in the Co. Jeep No 1. Lt Sholes jeep, his radio call sign was Uniform Oscar, and mine Uniform Oscar 1. The motor pool repainted it and we swapped out the nasty canvas top for a new one at LST beach and it even had an AM FM battery radio in it, and a neat shift knob someone from the 101st gave me with the "death from above" logo on it. I was the

company driver at Ft Story, and when not hauling the LT around, drove the big trucks on convoys when needed.

It was sad to hear what happened at LST beach right after I left, we were never allowed to have our weapons (M-14's then) mostly I believe because if all the division between blacks and whites then, we were all always fighting each other, and when we did go on alert, we only got 2 clips with 14 rounds in each. I believe that to this day, it the reason ever since I returned from there, that as an electrician, I have this phobia about having double or more of all my tools, trucks etc. I have always had no less then two trucks at any time, and even right now we have a 4x4 pickup and the main business van, plus a Toyota back up pickup and a spare ford Van. Well as time goes on I may recall other events that you may be interested in.

The troops in Iraq, how is it all going as far as transportation issues go? The gun truck era came about out of need in VN back then, but with all the IED's killing so many troops, I am wondering why if armor is a problem getting, why are they not doing something similar to the gun trucks as far as armor goes?

I am Vets affairs Crmn here in Mitchell Cty Dem Party, and there is a group of vets thru out NC called nc vets.org. I tried to get a thing going last year called Operation Troopbox going, to send items to the troops for Christmas. But except for my DAV chapter, I didn't have much luck. But we will tackle it again this year. We do supply phone cards from this county.

On a different note, I was one of 6 that originally formed Vietnam Veteran of America Ch 11, one of the first VVA chapters, while I lived on Long Island NY, and we all worked on helping get the Wall built, plus so many other things back in the early 80's.

I have sent the only other member of the 854th Kerry Jury (KLJury@aol.com) some of this info, we had in the past been in contact quite often, but he is a republican and a Bush man, and I'm independent, leaning more towards the Dems, so we didn't see eye to eye on that and he stopped replying back. We need meet for breakfast once near his town in 2000 tho.

Thanks for keepin in touch Rich
Rick Z